

## **7 - The Nineteenth Century**

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### **Two Rich Rectors**

Most of the 19th century in Purley was dominated by two very long serving and very well off rectors. Between them they spanned 75 years. Both did a lot for the parish with their money, both were very interested in education and were generally ahead of their time in this regard. It was during this period that tithes were sorted out, the parish fields were enclosed and above all the Great Western Railway drove its tracks right across the parish.

It was also a period of immense social change. The Reform Act was passed in 1832 and parishes had been grouped into Unions to reduce the burden of the Poor Laws on the rich. Throughout the nineteenth century the Reformers were at work and gradually the Church of England was awakened from its eighteenth century hibernation.

Purley was always a very agricultural parish and the changes affected agriculture profoundly. Peasant farmers were turned into labourers at near starvation wages, transport was revolutionised so people and produce could get more easily to the great towns and the old feudal way of life entered its death throes.

### **Charles Manesty 1800-1844**

Charles Manesty MA is Purley's longest serving rector. He was born in 1774, the son of James Manesty who was curate of Purley at the time of his son's appointment. Charles had probably been brought up in the village. He was inducted on 23rd March 1800. He was educated at St John's College Oxford taking his BA in 1794 and MA in 1798.

Henry Wilder died in 1814. He was buried in Sulham on 30th January 1814. He had been rector of Sulham since 1744 and had also served as curate to Purley, making the triennial reports in 1780 and 1783. Henry was educated at St John's College Oxford where he obtained the degree of Doctor of Laws. He held both the livings of Sulham and Edgecton in Buckinghamshire by special dispensation and acted as a Magistrate for Berkshire. The Wilder family had been associated with the manor of Nunhide since 1602 and purchased the manor of Sulham in 1712 and Purley Hall a little later. The family still own most of these lands as Henry Scutt, the present owner, is the great-great grandson of the last Reverend Henry Wilder of Sulham..

The patronage of Purley Church was transferred from the Crown to the Lord Chancellor's Department in 1822.

At the Archdeacon's visitation of August 23rd 1826 the churchwardens paid 13/6 for nine briefs. This was the last recorded payment of briefs as the system was abolished by Act of Parliament the next year.

Charles Manesty was granted leave of absence for one year in 1828 by the bishop and John Horsley Dakins was licensed as curate at a stipend of £75 pa, with the use of the rectory where he lived with his wife Sophie. In May he baptised his daughter Emily Caroline.

Other curates who served during Charles's incumbency were James Manesty (1789-1803), H. Romaine (1803), Edward Boisser (1825-26), G.Ogle (1826-27), Josh Bockett (1827) and R.T.Powys (1829). Richard Powys was the chaplain to the Alms Houses in Goring and related to the lords of the manor of Purley Parva.

Three men broke into the church in 1829 and stole a surplice and other items. The Churchwardens spent £10-17-2 to prosecute them.

Charles had enlarged the parsonage in 1805 when he built new stables and a barn in what had been an orchard and 1830 he mortgaged the rectory for £560 to pay for essential repairs and to make it larger.

At the Court Baron of Purley Parva in 1818 Charles' wife Eliza was made the second life on the copyholds that he held of the manor. His niece Emma Wharton was made the third life. He had just inherited these lands from his father James who had died in 1816.

The belfry and roof of the church were repaired in 1831. The churchwardens paid a man with three horses 8/6 to take the old lead, removed from the steeple, to Theale and bring back new lead. Most of the work was done by Messrs Thomas Draper and Buckeridge assisted by a carpenter and two men. The final bill came to £13-12-3. At the same time new bellropes were purchased for £1-12-0.

In the 1830s Charles was involved in the sale of part of the Glebe lands to the Great Western Railway for the construction of their new line between London and Bristol. He indulged in a very complex transaction whereby he sold land from his glebe to the GWR while at the same time Philip Powys of Hardwick sold them the land that Charles rented from the estate. All this on the condition that the GWR sell back the land they did not actually need to Charles as his own personal property, which they duly did.

In 1836 the Archdeaconary of Berkshire was transferred from Salisbury Diocese to Oxford Diocese in a large scale shake up of Diocesan boundaries.

After his sudden death on November 11th 1844, there was a sale of Charles Manesty's effects on 30th November. This was advertised in the Berkshire Chronicle and gives a fascinating picture of the domestic possessions of a fairly wealthy 19th century parson. It included over 600 ounces of silver and silver plate and around 800 books.

It would seem that his final illness caught Charles somewhat unaware as he had not bothered to make a will until the day before he died. There was not time to summon a solicitor from Reading and his gardener Jesse Lewenden together with Edward Sherwood and his sister Sarah witnessed the will. He was buried in Purley and a plaque to his memory was erected in the chancel.

### **Richard Palmer 1844-1875**

Richard Palmer had been rector of Blaby in Leicestershire from 1824 before being appointed to Purley where he was inducted on December 28th 1844. He was born 28th December 1795, the son of Richard Palmer of Hurst and was educated at Westminster School and Christchurch, Oxford where he took his BA in 1816 and MA in 1819. He studied law at Lincoln's Inn from 1819.

Richard Palmer was a great one for putting remarks in the parish registers. In 1846 he recorded that he had planted a Cedar of Lebanon and three other trees in the churchyard. Later in 1863 he planted a *Bellintonia Gigantes* in the churchyard, noting also that it had been an unusually fine winter. He followed this up by planting another cedar on the rectory lawn in the autumn of 1863. In 1868 he observed that it had been a very dry hot summer and the harvest had been very early.

Richard Palmer made several references to flooding in the parish registers. On 29th October 1848 he recorded *'There was so high a flood this day that the congregation was conveyed to and from the church in waggons'* On 14th November 1852 it was *'A very high flood. The churchyard impassable. Divine service in the school room for two Sundays'* In March 1862 *'After a very dry and mild winter a high flood in March. Not so high as '48 or '52'*

In the 1851 population census held on 30th March, Richard Palmer was recorded as a 55 year old bachelor living at the rectory with a housekeeper, a maid and a groom. An ecclesiastical census was held on the same day (Sunday) Purley was recorded as having 96 sittings of which 60 were free. There were two services, one in the morning and the other in the afternoon. The

morning congregation was 60 with an additional 25 at Sunday School. In the afternoon the figures were 25 plus 19. All these figures were reported as being close to the averages for the previous 12 months.

In 1869 he had to confess to the bishop that he had been absent from his parish for 77 days in the previous year as he had been detained in London through illness. He had a curate, William Stephens who held the fort in his absence.

## Education

For most of the past centuries the church was about the only source of education. During the middle ages it was the monasteries which provided a route to literacy for bright children identified by their local clergy or through these clergy acting as tutors for the children of the well to do. After the Reformation the monastic schools disappeared but local clergy continued to do a very limited job. A few charities emerged which ran fee paying schools, most of which developed into today's Public Schools. There was a very few schools for the children of the poor but the best most children could get were a few lessons to teach them bible stories and the very basics of literacy and numeracy.

In 1818 there was an enquiry into the state of education of the poor and Charles Manesty replied to a questionnaire from the Committee of Education in London. His report read:-

Q8 - What schools, not supported in whole or in part by charitable endowments exist in your parish?

A8 - One day school to which I send the younger children and th elder children I send to a day school in the adjoining parish, although I consider the poor of the parish to have sufficient means of educating at least part of their families.

The school in a neighbouring parish was no doubt the Breedon School in Pangbourne.

The school was reported on again in 1838 when it was stated that it was available to all the children of the village. From a study of the parish registers, noting proportions of marriage partners who were able to sign their name, we can deduce that this form of education had been going on in Purley since around 1760.

In 1833 the Government allocated £20,000 to supplement the efforts of charities in establishing local schools, but one condition was that the school had to be inspected on a regular basis. About the only people capable of doing the inspections were the local clergy. Often these inspections were little more than asking the children to respond to the Catechism or reciting a multiplication table but they inevitably concluded with a grant of a half day holiday.

When Richard Palmer became rector in 1844 he continued the school as the 1854 Billings Directory reported in its entry for Purley:-

Here is a small free school, built and supported by the Rector. School Mistress Mrs Mary Herridge.

This was a day school built in 1847 at a cost of £140. The number of scholars was reported on periodically as:-

Year	scholars
1853	30
1854	35
1857	31
1866	28
1869	34

Mary remained school mistress until 1869, living in half of one of the cottages in Purley Village, assumed to be Hemmington.

In 1870 the Elementary Education Act was passed. This had been preceded by considerable debate, questioning why the poor and labouring classes needed education in the first place and why the more affluent classes should be required to pay for it. The debate was won and the Education Act required that there must be an elementary school in every district and that new ones must be set if none existed. Richard Palmer, the then Rector, rose to the challenge and engaged Joseph Morris to design and build a new school for 55 children on the same site as the free school. The plan was that the school should be supported by voluntary contributions. Richard had inherited a large sum of money from his brother in 1872 and had moved to the family home at Holme Park in Sonning. But he died there in 1874 when the building works had just begun. His sister Susannah who inherited the house and money after Richard, however continued to fund the project and the new school was opened on the 9th February 1875.

The new rector, Charles Henry Travers suddenly found himself embroiled in a legal battle to establish who should run the school. It had been assumed that there would be three trustees, the rector and the two churchwardens. However the two churchwardens were Major Anthony Morris Storer and Thomas Barnes. Richard must have been very aware of the attitudes of Anthony Morris Storer who, as Lord of the Manor of Purley Magna, ruled the village like a feudal lord. Richard was determined that he should have no say in the running of the school and had specified that the Rector and his successors should be the sole trustee. Thus in a deed enrolled in February 1875 Richard's wishes were enshrined in law by his sister. This was to cause some difficulties for the Diocese about 100 years later as they had assumed it would become church property which the bishop could dispose of at will and so when they tried to close it down they found themselves without powers.

An inspection in April 1875 revealed that there was a common path to the toilets, situated in an outhouse in the grounds of the school and recommended:-

I would recommend the Managers to have separate paths to the boys and girls offices, and a barrier or partition preventing access from one office to the other.

Relations with the Storers seemed to be cordial however and Mrs Storer was often noted as visiting the school and providing materials for needlework or presenting prizes. Although the school had been built to accommodate 55 children in two classrooms, there were only 48 when it opened and for most of the rest of the century numbers rarely exceeded 40. Children were often reported as being absent, either because of sickness, or because they were required to work on the local farms to help with the harvest.

The school was inspected annually, usually by a member of the clergy appointed by the Diocese. On 29th April 1877 The Rev E Barber reported:-

Religious knowledge is good. The writing out of the catechism was exceptionally accurate and is much commended. Writing is generally good, arithmetic fair. The children need not be afraid of speaking out.